

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is deeply concerned by reports that the National Congress Party (NCP), headed by President Omar al-Bashir, appears to once again be threatening Sudan's fragile peace by reneging on previous commitments. On December 22, the NCP moved through the National Assembly, a body over which it has total control, the Southern Sudan referendum bill with new language that the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) did not agree to. Days earlier, on December 20, the NCP rammed through the National Assembly a revised National Security Act to which the SPLM had objected because the Act does not include any new measures that hold the security services accountable.

"Many in Sudan perceive that the U.S. Special Envoy, the European Union Special Representative, African Union countries, China, and others have emboldened the National Congress Party. These past weeks have shown all too clearly what actions an emboldened NCP will take," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. "USCIRF calls on Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to stand with the peace process and play a leading role to ensure the full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement." The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) is the fragile 2005 agreement that ended 20 years of a violent civil war between Northern and Southern Sudan.

"Once again the NCP has violated agreements it made with the SPLM, its supposed partner in the peace process," said Mr. Leo. "These violations are threatening to derail the CPA which provides the only existing roadmap to peace in Sudan and it is now hanging by a thread."

These most recent violations of the CPA took place mere weeks after government police and security personnel on December 7 arrested and abused opposition members of Sudan's National Assembly during their attempt to peacefully present a letter urging the enactment of human rights reforms and other key legislation necessary to implement the CPA. A USCIRF delegation was in Khartoum at that time where they met with senior SPLM leaders and other members of parliament. The delegation was told about people being detained and beaten and saw the bruises of an SPLM official who had been struck with batons and kicked repeatedly.

"The NCP's latest actions imperil the CPA. An emboldened NCP needs to hear directly from the Secretary that its violations of human rights and repudiations of agreements it made long ago to implement the CPA will not stand," said Mr. Leo.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the

facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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